

Camas-Washougal Wildlife League's days may be numbered

Shooting range could be in violation of city code

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A flip through the pages of the Camas-Washougal Wildlife League's scrapbook reveals how intertwined this organization has been with the local community since its inception nearly 90 years ago.

Photographs, cards, newspaper articles and other mementos found in the slightly tattered and worn book with

a dark green leather cover reflect what it once was.

"Wildlife League's Big Game Dinner to Highlight Saturday," reads the headline of one newspaper clipping from 1960s. "Birds fly at Camas Trap Club," says another from 1987.

The scrapbook also records popular events held at the clubhouse at 811 S.E. Leadbetter Road, like members' birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, as well as salmon bakes and community barbecues where alligator, raccoon, moose and elk were among the delicacies on the menu — all hosted by the

league, which in its heyday had 400 members.

A source of pride for many of its members, the non-profit organization also has a long history — more than 50 years — of offering hunter education courses at the clubhouse and shooting range. Outreach also included volunteer projects throughout the community, and welcoming Camas and Washougal high school students who would travel by bus to the C-W Wildlife League range for shooting lessons as part of their physical education classes.

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Pictured is an aerial view of the Camas-Washougal Wildlife League clubhouse and shooting range, located at 811 S.E. Leadbetter Road. Previously located in unincorporated Clark County, the club is in danger of closing because it was recently annexed into Camas city limits and would fall under code that makes discharging a firearm illegal.

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According to C-W Wildlife League President Tim Krout, the majority of these events are now mostly distant memories, as much has changed in the past decades for the organization, as well as the community it calls home. Membership has dwindled to about 50, and shooting at the range that was once allowed at least once a week is now down to being offered just twice a month. These changes have occurred primarily due to lack of interest.

The legality of having a shooting range at the Leadbetter Road site is now uncertain, after the C-W Wildlife League land and several large chunks of property on the north side of Lacamas Lake were annexed into Camas city limits. Currently, city code restricts the discharge of firearms.

"It's kind of a landmark in this area," Camas Police Department Sgt. Rob Skeens said of the C-W Wildlife

League during a recent council meeting. "I don't think it's a huge issue at this point, but it will be in the future."

The council will discuss a potential new revised ordinance, and hold a public hearing on the issue on Monday, at the Camas City Council's 7 p.m., meeting.

Krout, who has lived on site since 1984, said the range operations do not pose a danger to the general public.

"Safety has always been on our mind out here," Krout said. "The safety record is impeccable. We've never had an incident."

So far development has not occurred on any of the newly annexed property, but in the not-too-distant future construction of houses, businesses and other indications of urban growth will begin to occur. Krout said Wildlife League members would like to continue to shoot until that time.

"We knew it was coming," he said. "Once they start developing, we're done."

Jan Baldwin, also a longtime member of the C-W Wildlife League, agreed.

"We have no argument that once development starts, we're shut down."

87 years of local history

The C-W Wildlife League was first organized in 1923, with Don Mitchell as its first president. It was originally located in the Camas-Washougal Industrial Park off of Highway 14.

The organization disbanded during World War II, then re-organized again in 1948.

In 1954, the league signed a lease agreement with Crown Zellerbach for 8.5 acres on the north shore of Lacamas Lake, where in 1958 construction began on a building using all volunteer efforts and working capital of \$1,400.

In an effort to preserve the future of the C-W Wildlife League, in the 1980s longtime member and Camas sporting goods store owner

Carl Gehman brought together a group of investors — the North Lacamas Corporation. The group bought the 93 acres surrounding the club from Crown Zellerbach, then sold about 10.5 acres to the C-W Wildlife League.

In 2000, North Lacamas Corporation sold the remaining property to developer CJ Dens Land Company.

Today only shotguns can be fired at the range, which is open on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Members and the general public are welcome; Krout said about 25 people typically show up.

Exactly how long opportunities to shoot clay pigeons at the range on the banks of Lacamas Lake will last will likely be determined by the Camas City Council next week.

"With urban growth they know that their days are numbered," Skeens said. "It hasn't come to a head yet. They want to continue shooting as long as they can."